

Winning the West with Words: Language and Conquest in the Lower Great Lakes

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tinental perspective. Periodic passing reference to other biographical chapters ties the book together. This also means some repetition of historic events that are usually summarized after the initial discussion. Overall, this highly readable narrative, while offering little new for experienced western history scholars, provides an excellent overview of American interest in the trans-Mississippi West during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Winning the West with Words: Language and Conquest in the Lower Great Lakes, by James Joseph Buss. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011. vii, 328 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95 cloth.

Reviewer Stephen Warren is associate professor and chair of the department of history at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. He is the author of *The Shawnees and Their Neighbors, 1795–1870* (2005).

Winning the West with Words is a smart book about the erasure of American Indians from Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois history. Focusing on the nineteenth century, James Joseph Buss explores how non-Indians deployed the rhetoric of dispossession to facilitate Indian removal and to define American conquest as pacific and well-intentioned. Territorial governors such as William Henry Harrison, artists such as George Winter, and state historical societies described Americans as well-meaning conquerors. In their view, pioneers were family farmers who cleared the land, removed the Indians, and made way for a new American nation. This view of history, long called “progressive” by historians, equates American Indians with barbarism and American settlers with civilization. This mythological understanding of what it means to be an American, which has become the foundation of American identity, received its fullest treatment in the lower Great Lakes, the focus of Buss’s thoughtful book.

Buss challenges the myth of “passive conquest” (220) by describing the ongoing reality of cross-cultural midwestern worlds. County historians and state officials promoted the notion that the War of 1812 cleared the lower Great Lakes of native peoples, enabling settlers to enter an empty land. But many of the Miami Indians managed to avoid removal and remain in north-central Indiana. The Wyandots converted to Methodism and worked with missionaries to thwart Ohioans committed to ethnic cleansing. In 1843, when the Wyandots were forcibly removed from Ohio even though they had adopted most of the beliefs and behaviors of their non-native neighbors, their commitment to their lands forced midwesterners to examine the ugly truth of racial determinism.

Across the lower Great Lakes, non-Indians tried to erase the culturally plural communities that continued to create spaces and realities that were between colonial and indigenous worlds. In his chapter on the artist George Winter, Buss does a masterful job of illustrating the vanishing Indian thesis. Like his more famous contemporaries, such as George Catlin, Winter hoped to sell art to non-Indians interested in ethnographic renderings of American Indians. Winter moved to Logansport, Indiana, and soon realized that the Miami Indians were not living in a primitive state of humanity. Many Indiana Miamis lived on prosperous, privately owned farms, and they continued to supplement their communal income through the fur trade. Faced with that reality, Winter began creating fictitious, highly choreographed paintings of the Miamis as a means of pandering to potential art buyers. The Miami people simply did not fit into the progressive view of American history. Like their Wyandot and Potawatomi neighbors, the Miami had effectively tailored a life for themselves behind the frontier.

Winning the West with Words raises troubling questions about colonization and the historical record. Buss effectively argues that one must first know something about the motives of historical authors before one can come to know native people. Much of the primary source record of American Indian history was created by non-Indians bent on removing native people from the Midwest. These neo-colonial histories were further institutionalized around the turn of the twentieth century, when state historical societies and world's fairs promoted the view that Indians from Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois lived in a state of savagery. In this view, native peoples were part of a safely historical past. That judgment enabled midwesterners to ignore the culturally plural communities that so challenged artists such as George Winter and others like him.

Federally recognized tribes from the lower Great Lakes, including the Miami, Wyandot, Meskwaki, and Shawnee, are keenly aware of how these stereotypical, self-aggrandizing histories undermine indigenous understandings of American history. Indeed, native peoples have always struggled against popular misconceptions; asserting their own view of history is an essential part of recovering tribal sovereignty. They are challenged by the demands of non-Indian audiences, particularly those raised to believe in the progressive march from savagery to civilization. Buss unpacks narratives of conquest across the long nineteenth century, and there is much to recommend this approach. I hope that future research will assist native people by providing them with a more extensive treatment of the cross-cultural worlds they created in order to make a life for themselves after the War of 1812.